

Prime piece to complete



Former prime minister **Paul Keating** shares his preferred vision for what has become Sydney Harbour's most contentious site.

The key point to understand about Sydney's modern central civic and business district is that it is waterlocked. To the north by the harbour at Dawes Point, to the east by Farm Cove, with its trail of Botanic Gardens, and to the west by East Darling Harbour. In other words, the CBD is both the creation and a prisoner of its geography.

It is imperative, therefore, that any "new" or additional land that arises from the industrial reconfiguration of Sydney's maritime frontier is put to well-conceived and effective civic and commercial purposes. As unexceptional as this may sound, history has shown that this rarely happens. Or if it happens, rarely does it provide ordinary people with a civic "dividend" that means something to them. Something other than walking through someone else's development or past someone else's apartment.

The careful and now long master planning of East Darling Harbour, now known as Barangaroo, will avoid the mostly dismal history of similar sites. And this site is so

significant. Its sheer scale is remarkable, let alone its waterfront location. Though few Sydneysiders would realise it, its land space is equivalent to half the area bounded by Park Street, George Street, Circular Quay and Macquarie Street back to Park Street. It is the last great piece of the giant Sydney jigsaw. Industrially occupied, hidden from view, it has been waiting to be refolded back into the city proper; waiting for its final place of integration for the first time in its 200-year European occupation.

Barangaroo is a once-in-history opportunity: if we muck it up we will never recover it. Seven years ago its fate was to be decided by the control departments of the state government and its agencies: Treasury, Planning, Works, Sydney Ports, Maritime, Transport etc. All of those departments and agencies had a piece of it but not one had all of it and even if one had, none would have known what to do with it.

It would have been sliced away into single building sites most likely giving the city a monotone, dull built form along the straight edge of the existing wharf. The Treasury

BARANGAROO

- ▶ The Lend Lease concept is expected to cost \$6 billion.
- ▶ Barangaroo Delivery Authority says 50 per cent of the redevelopment of the area will be "public domain".
- ▶ A reported 15 per cent of the 500,000 sq m project will be over existing limits, with a 150-metre pier planned to be built over the water on which a 213-metre (60-storey) hotel is proposed.
- ▶ The headland will be reshaped; 3.5 hectares of water will be "returned" to Sydney Harbour, with original 1.4 kilometres of waterfront extended to 2.2 kilometres, including two coves.
- ▶ The precinct will be home to 22,000 residents and workers, and 33,000 visitors a day.

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would have got lots of money and the public would have got nothing.

So seven years ago, after Bob Carr announced the coming closure of the Patrick container wharf, I approached him and his ministers, Andrew Refshauge and Craig Knowles, to reserve by cabinet decision half of the site to open space; to let Sydney and its people have its

central Dawes Point peninsula bookended by the Botanic Gardens to the east and a new great garden to the west. And to their everlasting credit, they did.

But that general reservation of half nature and half built form could never have determined whether the ultimate development was to be great or good or even

mediocre. Indeed, even after the cabinet decision, the site had to be rescued from the control departments and agencies.

To this end, to give the general public ownership and a say in the site, the government, under then planning minister Frank Sartor, agreed to hold an international design competition for ideas and

the giant Sydney jigsaw



concepts as a precursor to a more specific master planning process. That master planning process is now just on complete and the end result is a strategic plan for Barangaroo that could only have been dreamt of seven years ago.

The historic and heritage stone line of Bridge Street means the city can go no further north. It therefore

has only one place to go and that is west. And it can only turn west north of King Street and that is to and upon the old Patrick wharves along Hickson Road. But it must make the turn in a big and confident way; for without larger buildings and a critical mass of people it will die on the periphery as other similar sites in Australia have died.

We also need to create here the second Circular Quay, another place to terminate the Parramatta River and other ferries linking them with heavy rail at Wynyard and light rail along Hickson Road. This can happen now that the international cruise ship terminal has moved to White Bay. In fact, these new ferry wharves will be closer to King Street

than Circular Quay is to King Street. So, we get a new city place from this; with a new financial district and a public ground plane of a kind that only exists now at East Circular Quay. But the difference is this ground plane will be 1½ kilometres long, with two new water inlets breaking the concrete monolith of the current wharf with a recreated

green headland at the north, whose topography will allow it to talk to Goat Island, to Balls Head, to McMahon's Point and to the new park at Ballast Point.

Strangely, some critics of the scheme argue for keeping the old wharf configuration, with its aircraft-carrier geometry and linear hardness. But this jars with the romantic nature of every Sydney headland, point, bay and inlet characterised by sandstone and green. In the 1960s, the then Maritime Services Board vandalised Sydney's western waterfront. The board built a massive container wharf with no railways to service it, obliterating the historic Cockle Bay.

But not only that, sawing Millers Point headland in half and using the half to fill in the bay. The new scheme will rebuild that headland and will let the water back in, going a long way to remediating the wilful damage done by this self-serving authority.

Process mostly robs Sydney of quality redevelopment of this kind, but this time a civic overview and people-conscious master planning will deliver something far, far better.

Paul Keating was chairman of the Barangaroo Delivery Authority's design review committee.



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A different view